

Can God Be Known? by Jesse C. Jones



available on Scribd via [SCrosnoe](#)

CAN GOD BE KNOWN?



Jesse C. Jones

About the Cover Art

Special thanks to Rex Morache for the cover composite of the human brain and a portion of space often called the “**Eye of God**” (more detail below). Both are under the magnifying glass which is held by a human hand. The type and portions of the imagery go from blurred to sharp in order to convey our blurry comprehension contrasted with GOD's sharp reality. You can see more of his work on Flickr here: [Rexm Photostream](#)

Note: The NASA space image is called the “**Eye of God** / Helix Nebula”. This is an authentic photograph (actually, a [composite of images](#)) taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope and at the Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona. It was featured on NASA's website as an [Astronomy Picture of the Day](#) in May 2003 and thereafter reproduced on a number of websites under the title “**The Eye of God**”. The awe-inspiring image has also been featured on magazine covers and in articles about space imagery.

What it actually depicts is the so-called [Helix Nebula](#), described by astronomers as “a trillion-mile-long tunnel of glowing gases.” At its center is a dying star which has ejected masses of dust and gas to form tentacle-like filaments stretching toward an outer rim composed of the same material.

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Preface	1
----------------	----------

Chapter 1

Chosen?	3
The Argument for Predestination	6
The Meaning of the Word Predestinated	8
Foreknowledge Versus Foreordained	9
The Lamb's Book of Life	12
The Quickened Human Spirit	14
The Question	15

Chapter 2

Once Chosen: Always Saved?	17
Apostasy	19
Failure to Believe	38
Conclusion	49

Chapter 3

Free Will?	51
Background	51
The Meaning of Free Will	53
The Unregenerate Man and Free Will	57

Free Will and the Process of Salvation	64
--	----

Chapter 4

The Foreknowledge of God	68
---------------------------------	-----------

Argument Against God's Total Foreknowledge	69
--	----

The Scriptural Meaning of Foreknowledge	75
---	----

Anthropomorphism	79
------------------	----

Conclusions	82
-------------	----

Closure	84
---------	----

Appendix

Preface

Charles Hodge's "Systematic Theology" Volume 1, page 335 states, "It is the clear doctrine of the Scriptures that God can be known. . . The Psalmist says, '*In Judah is God known*' (Psalm 76:1). Isaiah predicts, that '*the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord*' (Isaiah 11:9). Paul says even of the heathen, that they knew God, but did not like to retain that knowledge (Romans 1:19, 20, 21, 28)." On the other hand Isaiah 55:8 says: "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord*". In this book we attempt to understand and "know" God in the way He chose to deal with mankind in bringing men (and women) to eternal life. In many ways this task seems beyond the capability of a man, and I have been reminded more than once that I may have bitten off more than I can chew, or worse, God may not appreciate me describing how He feels and what He understands and doesn't understand: good reason for staying close to Bible scripture for clues about this great mystery.

The wisdom of God is obviously beyond our comprehension, but with His book (the Bible), and guidance from the Holy Spirit, we may be able to grasp at least an inkling of His nature, as it relates to bringing some to eternal life. This is the task undertaken in this book. I can only pray that what is documented

here accurately describes God's purposes, thoughts, and understanding in this great mystery, so that some insight concerning these things can be conveyed to readers.

This subject is not discussed directly in the Bible, so we are forced use conjecture, assumptions, logic, and extrapolations from Bible stories to form any meaningful conclusions. Further, there are many different books on this general subject by other writers and expositors of God's Word, many of which (if not all) disagree with the suggestions and conclusions herein. I hope the reader will read this book with an open mind, and an open Bible, for this subject must be thoroughly studied in order to form any meaningful understanding of this difficult subject.

In writing this book I have used many different biblical word dictionaries, and lexicons. My primary reference has been the King James Version of the Bible (KJV), and all scripture references are from this source, unless otherwise noted. I have also used the "Interlinear Greek - English New Testament" by Jay P. Green, Sr., and the "Interlinear NIV Hebrew - English Old Testament" by John R. Kohlenberger III. I have used Hodge's Systematic Theology, and the internet in some searches, and lest I forget, I have used Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible as necessary.

Chapter 1

Chosen?

This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult biblical teachings for believers to accept. Our concept of justice rebels at the thought that God would choose some for salvation and reject others, thus condemning them to eternal punishment and suffering. We refuse to accept the fact that God could act in a way that conflicts with our own sense of right and wrong. This is the problem addressed by Paul in Romans 9:18-21: *“Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter the power [a right] over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another to dishonour?”* God is the Creator of all men, but He is Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). God the Father administers justice with wisdom, kindness, mercy, and love far be-

yond our comprehension. As His children we must recognize His authority over us in everything.

I wrestled with this teaching for many years. As a result, I have some understanding of the difficulty in accepting it, and making it part of one's belief system. I struggled for many years trying to find a way to make God's teaching on predestination and foreknowledge palatable with my own sense of justice, but in the end I gave up and decided to totally abandon my own idea and just accept what I was repeatedly being confronted by in God's Word, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you*" (John 15:16). Since that time I have come to appreciate why God chose us rather than waiting and hoping that we would choose Him. The reverence and awe I have for God's majesty has only increased as a result.

I do not believe this difficult teaching can be received through scriptural analysis and reasoning alone. I have had occasion to teach this belief to several different groups in the past, and have generally met with disagreement, and some outright irritation. I have come to believe this is a decision of the will: through our will we accept this as God's plan, or refuse to accept it and continue to believe as we have in the past (Philippians 2:13). Thus, I am including

summary information only on the words *election* and *chosen* and their derivatives, and basing my principal argument on only one single scriptural truth out of hundreds in the Bible that allude to God's choosing those who would receive eternal life.

1. *Election* refers to God the Father choosing (predestinating) those that would be regenerated, saved, and sanctified, before the foundation of the world. By choosing certain people God seems to commit Himself to doing what is necessary to insure that these chosen ones are "called" to Jesus Christ. The word "elect" is used in the OT three times, all in Isaiah. Two of these references pertain to God's election of Israel, and one refers to the coming Messiah. The word elect (elected, election, elect's) is used 22 times in the NT, 21 of which refer to the election of those in the body of Christ (the church), and one to elect angels (see 1 Peter 1:2; Romans 9:11; Revelation 17:8). None of the uses of these words refer to men electing to come to Christ.

2. *Chosen*, as used in the NT, conveys the idea of choosing recipients to bestow special favor and privilege. The word chosen is used in the OT 94 times, 21 of which refer to God the Father choosing Israel, or the Savior. Chosen is used in the NT 30 times, nine of which refer to those in the body of Christ (the church) being chosen out of the world (see John 15:16; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11;

Romans 8:29). The evidence from study of the six words choose, chooseth, chooseth, choosing, chose, and chosen, as used in the KJV of the bible, exclusively supports the fact that God chooses men, men do not choose God. Of the 216 times these words are cited, 78 relate to God choosing a man, men, Israel, or the elect. The remaining citings are unrelated to this search.

It seems clear from analysis of the words election and chosen, as used in the Bible, that God chooses those that belong to Him, and man's free will is not involved in this decision in any way at all. In fact, the Bible teaches that unregenerate man does not have free will in regard to choosing or not choosing God (see Romans 9:10-24).

The Argument for Predestination

As indicated above, I would like to present the case for God predestinating some men to be His children, and leaving others in their unregenerate state by focusing on only one passage of scripture: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame [blemish] before him in love: Having predestinated [foreordained] us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to*

the good pleasure of his will" (Ephesians 1:3-5). This passage of scripture says that God the Father chose believers before the foundation of the world, that they should be sanctified (become holy), and be washed clean by the blood of Christ and the Word of God.

In ancient Jewish marriage rites the father of the groom chose the future bride, and arranged the betrothal (promise to be married) to his son. In like manner the Father (God), of the groom (Christ), betroths the chosen to Christ just as the Jewish father selects and betroths the future bride to his son. The Bible refers to the church as the bride of Christ many times.

I should add one additional point taken from Revelation 21:27, which says that the names of those that God chose before the foundation of the world were written in a book identified as the Lamb's Book of Life. Those whose names are not found in this book are cast into the lake of fire at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:15). This is a simple statement of fact: anyone who accepts the Bible as the inerrant Word of God can easily understand and agree with this statement, but it is important for us to consider what this passage of scripture implies. I have attempted to do this below by addressing the points often brought up by those who feel that God did not mark out, appoint, or determine beforehand those that would become members of

His family by exercising His own will, without any consideration of merit on the part of the elected.

The Meaning of the Word Predestinated

The word *predestined* is defined in Moulton's Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised as "to limit or mark out beforehand; to design definitely beforehand; ordain beforehand; predestine." Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words adds that the Greek word *proorizo* (interpreted as "predestine" in English), is derived from *pro*, meaning "before" or "ahead of", and *orizo*, which means to appoint, decide, or determine. Webster's Dictionary defines predestine as: "to destine or decree beforehand; foreordain."

John MacArthur's Study Bible says that the words predestinated and foreknowledge have the same meaning according to a rule in Greek grammar called the Granville Sharp Rule. He further adds that these words indicate that who God chooses He destines for His chosen end: likeness to His Son. He gives to His elect the very nature of His Son through the person of the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ). However, use of the word "*predestined [foreordained]*" in the above scripture indicates that God takes it on Himself to insure that the cho-

sen will be holy and without blemish when they meet the Lord face-to-face.

This is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 2.

Foreknowledge Versus Foreordained

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible says the foreknowledge comes from the Greek verb *proginosko*, from which the English word “prognosis” is derived. The verb form of this word is used twice in the NT to describe human knowledge, as someone knowing a person or teaching for a long time (Acts 26:5; 2 Peter 3:17). As both verb and noun this word is used five times in the GNT to refer to divine foreknowledge (Acts 2:23; 1 Peter 1:2, 20; Romans 8:29, 11:2). Charles Hodge's “Systemic Theology” states that the difference between foreknowledge and foreordination is that foreknowledge only assumes the certainty of future events, whereas foreordination (predestination) means that God commits Himself to insure that these events come about. The result is the same in either case: the certainty of occurrence is assured. The NT actually uses these words to convey the same meaning. In Acts 2:23, the word foreknowledge is combined with the phrase, “*determinate counsel*” to describe the crucifixion of Christ. In 1 Peter 1:20 the word “*foreknown*” is used in the GNT, while the word “*foreordained*” is used in the KJV. In this case the context

makes it clear that Christ was foreordained to this end. 1 Peter 1:20 refers to the fact that God “*foreknew*” that Jesus would come to earth to shed His blood, and Romans 11:2 refers to God’s faithfulness to the people He “*foreknew*”.

In referring to salvation Hodge says, “If He purposes that a man shall reap, He purposes that he shall sow; if He purposes that he shall be saved, He purposes that he shall believe. Anti-Augustinians, on the other hand, regard the purposes of God as conditional. He purposes the salvation of a man, if he believes. But whether he believes or not, is left undetermined; so that the purpose of God is left suspended on a condition not under His control, or, at least, undecided. It is however, manifestly inconsistent with the perfection of God, that He should first will one thing and then another; nor can His purposes be dependent on the uncertainty of human conduct or events.”

In many cases we surmise, through our “limited” foreknowledge (prognosis?), that we will act in a certain way when confronted by a certain set of circumstances. When we actually find ourselves in that situation we are still free to act, and are conscious that we act freely. Charles Hodge gives the example of a parent being certain that he will succor a child in distress, and yet be conscious that his freedom to act is not impaired when he does so. I certainly do not believe that God looked down through time with foreknowledge

and saw that certain people were going to accept Him, and these he predestined. This would be as if God, seeing that certain people were going to choose Him, chose (or predestinated) them. Does this make any sense? What would be the purpose of God choosing men if He absolutely knew that these men were going to choose Him?

The Bible seems to tell a completely different story: unregenerate man's heart is evil continually. His human spirit is dead to God, and thus, there is no way for him to receive guidance and communication from God. Only God can quicken (awaken, give life to) man's human spirit. Paul goes out of his way to make the point in Romans Chapter 9, that choosing is of Him that calleth (God), not of any works of the chosen.

I do not know of an instance in the Bible where God chose anyone for anything based on their works. In fact it is quite the opposite, God chooses people for certain tasks, and then equips them for accomplishing the task. It is significant that no works of unregenerate man are acceptable to God; only works done through the Holy Spirit in regenerated men are acceptable: works that survive the refiner's fire (1 Corinthians 3:13-15). The foreknowledge spoken of here refers to God's awareness that in spite of all the attempts on His part to reconcile man to Himself, in the end the only remedy was for Him to

choose those that would comprise His family; send His Son into the world to provide a way for these chosen vessels (unregenerate bodies) to be cleansed and cause their human spirits to be “quickenened; send the Holy Spirit into these bodies to provide ongoing guidance, knowledge, and spiritual wisdom; and place the risen Christ at His right hand in heaven to act as Mediator of this new covenant to make sure that none of these elect were lost.

I think it is important to emphasize that unregenerate man has no way to access or communicate with God within himself (1 Corinthians 2:14): Adam took care of that. Thus, the only way the cleansing process (leading to salvation) can start is for God to initiate it “*No one can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.*”(John 6:44).

The meaning of “foreknowledge” is discussed in considerable depth in Chapter 3.

The Lamb’s Book of Life

Revelation 20:15 makes it clear that the Lamb’s Book of Life is the Book in which God recorded all the names of those He chose to be with Him for eternity. Some believe that names are added to this Book as they come to believe in Christ, and this is used to justify their belief that men choose to accept

Christ. I do not know of a scripture that makes this absolutely clear, but Revelation 17:8 says, “*..they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life, from the foundation of the world, ...*” . Versions of the Bible other than the KJV use different verbs in place of “*were*”, but they all include the phrase “*from the foundation of the world*”, which seems to make it clear that all the names of the elect were written there at that time, and at no other time. Further, there are no scriptures that mention adding names to the Book of Life, but there are several that refer (or imply) that names may be removed (see Psalm 69:28; Revelation 3:5; 22:19).

Some people believe that the Lamb's Book of Life originally included the name of every person ever born on earth, and that God removes the names of those that reject Him. The Bible is not totally clear on this point, and there are other books mentioned in addition to the Lamb's Book of Life; however, in view of Revelation 17:8, and other similar scriptures I believe that the Lamb's Book of Life has always included the names of only those that God chose as His elect. It is certainly clear from Revelation 20:15 that the Book of Life ultimately (if not continuously), contained only the names of those elected to eternal life. To believe that God is nothing but a scribe in all of this, adding or erasing names as individuals make decisions, seems to lessen His majesty as

Creator of the universe, and conflicts with His all seeing providence described in Psalm 139. Further, it would seem strange for God to emphasize removing certain names from His book if it was commonly done for every non-believer.

The Quickened Human Spirit

We know from Ezekiel 36:26, one of the things that happen when a man/woman believes into Christ is that they receive a new human spirit. The word “renewed”, would be a more accurate description of what actually happens.

We know we are born with a human spirit that is dead to God, for this is the part of Adam (and all men through him) that died immediately when he took of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:3). When the Father starts to draw us to Christ our dead human spirit is revived, or “renewed”, and we are enabled to communicate with God, through the Holy Spirit.

When did God give us our human spirit? Several scriptures in the Bible refer to the fact that God made man’s spirit: Ecclesiastes 12:7 and Zechariah 12:1 indicate that God “*gave*”, and “*formed*” man’s spirit. Our spirit identifies who we really are, for God is a spirit (John 4:24), and we are made in the image of God. Psalm 139:13 NIV says, “*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.*” I believe the phrase “*my inmost being*” refers to our human

spirit, for we know that our being is really our spirit that resides in the abode (body) that God forms in the womb, and returns to God at the death of the body (Job 34:14; Ecclesiastes 3:21; 12:7; Acts 7:59).

The KJV of this scripture says, “. . . *thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb*”.

This seems to indicate that God covers the being (human spirit) of a person with a body while in the womb. If this is so, it provides an answer to several questions related to the subject of this article. If God “*forms*” this spirit, He certainly knows whether it has the seed of regeneration within it, in other words, He knows it will “*quicken*”, when He initiates the drawing process.

What this means to us as far as this article is concerned is that God follows through on His choosing of a person before the foundation of the earth by forming the (future) believer’s human spirit, and covering it with a body while they are in the womb.

The Question

I would like to close this argument for predestination with a question: On the chance that God’s choosing of (future) believers by His own free will before the foundation of the world is both true and Biblical, when you meet Him face-to-face would you rather be thanking Him for choosing you, or

trying to justify why you thought you really chose Him? If it is not true that God chose us, those of us that ignorantly believe that it is will probably not be chastised for thanking Him profusely anyway.

Chapter 2

Once Chosen: Always Saved?

“According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame [blemish] before him in love: Having predestinated [foreordained] us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” (Ephesians 1:4-5)

The title of this article may be confusing to some, but the subject it introduces has been a point of interest to Christians for many, many years: do those chosen by God invariably enter eternal life in His kingdom at death? The related statement, “once saved, always saved”, is not the only impediment to understanding the overall issue raised here. Some that identify themselves as Christians in today’s world would not agree with the teaching that God chooses and predestines those that will become His children; however, that is the subject of Chapter 1, and not the primary issue addressed herein. In this article we accept the above quote from Ephesians as a clear statement that God

chose certain ones to become members of His family throughout eternity, and we focus on whether someone chosen by God for eternal life could fail to believe, or having believed, could abandon their faith (apostatize).

These are difficult questions, but I believe the Holy Spirit has been working to renew my mind on the difficult and confusing subject of the efficacy of God's plan to bring those He has chosen home to eternity in His kingdom. As with many of the writing projects I have undertaken, my intuition went into overdrive after reading a book written by John Owen entitled: "Apostasy from the Gospel".

Prior to reading this book I had not considered the subject of apostasy in any serious way; in fact, I "harbored" the feeling referred to above, that once a person is saved, they were always saved. A statement printed on the back cover of Owen's book addresses this point: "Few subjects have received less attention from contemporary Christian writers than that of apostasy. The idea that professing Christians may prove not to be true Christians is, in many respects, too serious a prospect for our facile age. But, for John Owen, such avoidance of the issue was itself a pressing reason for writing on it at length and in great depth of spiritual analysis. His exposition is a masterpiece of penetration and discernment."

While reading Owen's book I began to seriously question how someone who had been chosen by God before the foundation of the world, had their name written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and received salvation through Christ, could then fall away, reject their faith in God, and have their name removed from His Book. As a result, I began to search the Bible to see what God had to say about this, as well as the corollary question about those who are chosen, but fail to achieve salvation. What I found is documented below.

Apostasy

In dealing with the church at Sardis in Revelation 3:4-5, the Lord states that He will not blot out the names of those who had "*not defiled their garments*" (sullied the purity of their Christian life), from the Book of Life. It seems clear from this statement that the Lord can blot out names from the Book of Life under certain circumstances, one of which is soiling their Christian character. Revelation 17:8 states that those that dwell on the earth, "*... whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, ... will wonder, seeing the beast that was and is not, and yet is*".

This states clearly that God did not write some names in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world. These are the ones that will be cast into the

lake of fire at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:15). Ephesians 1:4 adds: “*According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, . . .*” Thus, we know that names written in the Book of Life are those that God chose before He spoke the world into existence.

The difficulty in accepting the idea that God would blot names out of the Book of Life comes from the belief that if we are once saved, we are always saved. This belief is often attributed to doctrine of the Baptist church, but it is widely accepted by believers of all faiths worldwide, and it is based on a considerable volume of scripture. As indicated above, I held to this belief for much of my life, and have only recently begun to question it. In seeking a clear-cut answer to this question from God’s Word I have not been able to find a specific statement in the Bible that says a believer cannot lose his or her salvation.

On the other hand, John’s gospel includes two statements by Jesus that could possibly be construed to mean that salvation, once received, cannot be lost. John 6:39-40 states that it is the Father’s will that none of those He has given Jesus should be lost. From this we see that it is the Father’s will that no believer should fall into apostasy or unbelief, but nevertheless we know that man has been acting contrary to the Father’s will since the time of Adam and

Eve in the Garden of Eden. John 6:40 GNT says, "*This is the will of the (One) who has sent me, that everyone seeing the Son and believing into Him should have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.*" There are several important points to be made here:

1. The "*will*" of the Father expressed in this verse is better understood to mean the "desire" of the Father. In John 7:17 Jesus said, "*If any man will (willeth to) do his will...*", but the GNT gives this as, "*If anyone desires to do his will...*". This reflects the fact that men do not always follow God's will. Jesus, when praying in the Garden of Gethsemane said, "... *not as I will, but as thy wilt*", which seems to further imply that God's will does not always rule man's decisions. However, in this case Jesus accepted the Father's will over that of His own. There are many other examples of this in God's Word leaving little doubt that the Greek word "*thelo*", interpreted by the English word "*will*" in John 6:40, expresses strong desire of the Father, not an edict that He enforces.
2. Everyone "*seeing*" and believing "*into*" the Son should have everlasting life. This is such an important point often missed entirely by many versions of the Bible. In their commentary on John 3:16, the Recovery Version of the Bible states, "Believing into the Lord is not the same as believing (in) Him. To believe (in) Him is to believe He is true and real, but to believe into Him

is to receive Him and be united with Him as one. The former is to acknowledge a fact objectively; the latter is to receive a life subjectively.” A contemporary phrase often used to describe believing into the Lord is “having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” In many, if not most, uses of the phrase “in Christ” in various versions of the Bible, the actual wording in the Greek Bible is “into Christ”.

3. Another important point here is the use of the phrase “*should have eternal life*”. It is difficult to determine the exact meaning of this phrase, for it could be interpreted to mean that believers into Christ are responsible for entering eternal life, but it could also be interpreted to mean that entering into eternal life is not an absolutely sure thing for believers. The English word “*should*” in this verse interprets a Greek word “ἐχῆ” (epsilon-chi-eta), that is difficult to define in the English language. One definition seems to give the meaning as “to have, have ready, be furnished with” (Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised by Moulton). Different versions of the Bible have used different English words here: e.g. the KJV uses the word “*may*”, the Geneva Bible uses the word “*should*”, and the NIV uses the word “*shall*”. Strong’s New Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words says, “This word stresses that one has the means to accomplish a task.”

John 6:40 does not say that it is impossible for believers to become apostates, even though it clearly is the Father's will (desire) that no believer should. John 10:29 states that no one can "*pluck*" those that are given to Jesus out of the Father's hand. From this we conclude that no one can forcefully seize another from God or Jesus (snatch or *pluck* them out of His hand). Whether the believer, of His own volition, can fall into apostasy and unbelief is not clearly established here.

Many scriptures in the Bible record the fact that those who belong to God can fall into apostasy, even though it is not the Father's will (Isaiah 1:21; Jeremiah 2:11, 21; 1 Corinthians 15:10-12; Galatians 3:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Titus 4:1; 2 Titus 4:2-4; Hebrews 6:4-6, 10:26-29; Revelation 2, 3). There are also some specific scriptures that indicate it is possible to have your name removed from God's Book of Life. A few of these are listed below:

Exodus 32:32 - Moses asks to be blotted out of God's book.

Exodus 32:33 - God answers Moses and says that whoever sins against Him He will blot out of His book.

Psalms 69:28 - David in praying to God about his enemies says, "*Let them be blotted out of the book of the living (life), and not be written with the righteous.*"

Revelation 22:19 - Says that God will take away from the Book of Life the part of anyone that takes away from the words of the book of Revelation.

In addition, there are a few scriptures that seem to indicate that it is possible to lose our fellowship with Christ:

Matthew 25:1-13 - In the parable of the ten virgins Jesus refuses to admit the five virgins that did not maintain oil in their lamps to the marriage feast of the Lamb. In verse 12 He says that He does not know them.

Hebrews 6:4-6 - This scripture says *“it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they fall away, to renew them to repentance; seeing they crucify the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame”*.

Hebrews 10:26-29 - *“For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins . . . Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace”?*

Matthew 7:21-23 - *“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

Although it may be difficult to believe that a person can lose fellowship with Christ and have Him say to us at judgment, *I know you not*, these scriptures seem to be absolutely clear: we ignore them at our own peril.

In his book Owen says, “. . . enmity of heart is the first cause and reason why so many fall away from the doctrine of the gospel after receiving it. The only way to prevent this falling away from the gospel is to love the truth and experience its power in the heart. ... Evangelical doctrine must be understood by the mind, loved by the heart, and willingly and gladly submitted to by the will (Romans 6:17).” Owen goes on to say that apostasy arises from men’s refusal to accept evangelical truths on God’s authority alone, “Today there are many in the church who subject Scripture to man’s finite, limited and corrupted reason. It is man’s reason and not God’s infallible revelation that determines what is true and what is false, what is good and what is evil. This has

been so since this principle was first taught to man in the garden of Eden. The poison of these principles is greatly diffused in the world and the gospel is greatly corrupted. Such doctrines as eternal predestination, the total depravity of man concerning spiritual things, the power of Christ's grace in the conversion of sinners, regeneration, union with Christ, the imputation of Christ's righteousness for justification, the need for internal evangelical holiness, the need for the grace and help of the Spirit and the divine authority of the Scriptures are all rejected. Reason can see no logic in these things."

To return to the church at Sardis, although members of this church were apparently believers, they had not allowed the Holy Spirit to renew their minds, and consequently they had no (or few) works that Christ considered acceptable. Christ tells them that when He comes (unexpectedly), they are not going to be prepared to meet Him. Some of these may be like the five foolish virgins in Matthew 25:1-12: they will hear those fateful words "*I know you not*".

The contemporary church in America has largely failed to preach the full message of the Bible. I believe this has happened as a result of the way which churches are organized and managed under the hierarchical arrangements of the various denominations. Churches have, in the main, become businesses, and there are some that qualify as large businesses. Businesses must make

money, stay in the black, offer promotional opportunities and fringe benefits for their employees, maintain a friendly relationship with (largely unbelieving) general society, and build large and impressive buildings in order to convince potential customers that they are successful.

None of this seems related to lifting up Jesus Christ, becoming a servant to those in need, preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the brokenhearted, preaching deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, and setting at liberty those that are bruised (Luke 4:18-19). The church no longer seems to provide the salt that society needs to retain its savor, and, as a result, society has gone “flat”.

There was a time in our country when the church of Jesus Christ was such a positive influence on society that even those outside the church, the unregenerate, refrained from doing evil that is now so common. To these unbelievers it was a choice: they could do whatever their wicked hearts imagined and face the rejection of friends, acquaintances, and society; or they could live by the societal standards prevalent in the locale in which they lived, and be accepted. Most chose to live peaceably and conform to the moral and ethical standards of those around them. As hopeless as it now appears, God still holds out a way

for the church to regain its former purity: repent, and open the door, so that Christ may come in and sup (have spiritual communion) with us.

If God chooses us, how is it possible to fail to believe, or fall into apostasy? As indicated above, this subject is apparently too controversial for our facile age to be able to deal with. If it is to be dealt with at all it would have to be brought up by preachers and teachers of God's Word, and how many sermons (or teachings) have you heard lately on the subject of apostasy, or of the chosen's failure to believe? Election and apostasy: is it possible for both of these teachings to be truly applicable to the destiny of man?

To answer this question I believe we need to begin with Jesus' teaching to the Pharisees in Matthew 12:31-32: *"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blaspheme shall be forgiven unto men: but the blaspheme against the Holy Ghost [Spirit] shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."* Mark 3:29 says, *"But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation [but is guilty of eternal sin]"*. Blaspheme is defined as "to speak evil of", and in the Bible it often refers to attributing the work of

God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit to Satan, or vice-versa, attributing the work of Satan to God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.

Blaspheme against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven: Christians who have not received the Holy Spirit need to heed this cautionary warning and ask in accordance with Luke 11:13. From the above scriptures we know that utter blaspheme, cannot be forgiven and must therefore result in a reprobate life: separation from God in both this life and the next. We know this applies to the unregenerate, who have not received the Holy Spirit, but can it also apply to believers who fall into apostasy? Can believers backslide (fall into apostasy) to such a degree that they end up rejecting the Holy Spirit? In the passage quoted above from Matthew it seems from the context that Jesus is speaking of those that reject salvation; however, in Acts 26:10-11, Paul tells King Agrippa about how he tried to compel the “*saints*” to blaspheme before he met Jesus.

Although blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is not specifically mentioned here, it seems from the context that Paul is referring to these saints renouncing their belief into Jesus Christ, which would seem to be tantamount to rejection of the Holy Spirit. The OT also includes several references to God rejecting Israelites who had blasphemed His name (see Isaiah 65:7). From these examples we assume that it is possible for believers to fall into apostasy, renounce

their faith in Jesus Christ, and reject (blaspheme) the Holy Spirit. Whether mature, committed Christians who have joined in Christ's death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, who are well along in the sanctification of their minds by the Holy Spirit, who have found their place in the body of Christ, who have Spiritual gift(s) operating in their lives, and who manifest the fruit of the Holy Spirit, can fall into this condition may well be another question: one that may not be answered unequivocally in God's Word. To examine this further let us turn to one of the two scriptures in Hebrews referred to earlier.

Hebrews 6:1-6 says: *"Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on into perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame."* I believe God is warning believers in this passage of the importance of going on unto "*perfection*", which is a deeper relationship than that of merely understanding the doctrinal principles of Christ, including repentance

from dead works, faith in God, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. Many who identify themselves as Christians would have considerable difficulty with even these fundamental principles, since there is so little teaching of what is here identified as the “*doctrine of Christ*” in churches today. Nevertheless, these principles were considered basic to believers in the first century church. This passage then goes on to further distinguish those who are the focus of this teaching by adding that they were once enlightened (had received spiritual enlightenment), had tasted the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost (received the Holy Spirit), had received teaching from the Word of God (the Bible), and had experienced (in some small measure) things characteristic of the world to come. This passage of scripture would certainly seem to be describing believers, but notice there is no mention that these believers had entered into the sanctification process: being transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). God intends for all believers to undergo this transformation, for it leads to that most important goal in a believer’s life: conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ. As a believer’s mind is progressively renewed by the sanctification process they become more holy. Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words says, “Since every believer is sanctified in

Christ Jesus, 1 Corinthians 1:2, cf. Hebrews 10:10, a common NT designation of all believers is saints, *hagioi*, i.e., sanctified or holy ones. Thus, sainthood, or sanctification, is not an attainment, it is the state into which God, in grace, calls sinful men, and in which they begin their course as Christians, Colossians 3:12; Hebrews 3:1.”

God sees all believers as being in Christ, totally holy and clean when they join Him in death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 1:30), but the process of sanctification is continually ongoing for the rest of the believer’s life. This process begins after the Holy Spirit enters our bodies, and concludes when we have breathed our last breath. The problem with the believers in Hebrews 6:1-6, was that they never “*presented their members as servants to righteousness unto holiness [sanctification]*” (Romans 6:19). We must desire and strive for the Holy Spirit’s renewing of our minds, and be willing (with God’s help) to take authority over those three great weaknesses of man: lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

We now come to the crux of this passage of scripture: Hebrews 6:6, says: “*If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.*” This seems to say that if those described above fall away into apostasy, they cannot be restored or rec-

onciled to God, for Jesus was crucified for the sin of man only once for all eternity (Hebrews 7:27). This describes believers who had been born again through Jesus' death and resurrection, but later had fallen away, rejecting their relationship with Jesus, and through their words and actions brought shame and ridicule on our Lord.

Although it is not stated in this verse, it seems apparent that such apostates would be guilty of rejection, or blaspheme of the Holy Spirit, since His mission within the body is to bring it (the mind, or biblical heart), into conformance with the image of Jesus Christ, to make the believer holy. Blaspheme of the Holy Spirit is clearly stated by Jesus to be the only unforgivable sin (Matthew 12:31). Since these apostates cannot be restored again to repentance, this seems to be the only logical explanation of their spiritual condition. John Owen's book (page 8), referred to above, has this to say about Hebrews 6:1-6, "It is a great mercy, a great privilege to be enlightened with the doctrine of the gospel and to have its truths impressed on our minds by the inward work of the Holy Spirit. This great mercy and privilege may be lost by the sin of neglect, which will serve only to increase the sinfulness and condemnation of those who were once made partakers of this privilege. Where there is a total neglect of this great privilege, with no attempt to grow in the knowledge of the gospel, the

condition of such persons is very dangerous and could lead to final apostasy, from which they will find it impossible to repent.” Owen’s book discusses apostasy at great length, and I would recommend it highly to anyone seeking to understand this deeper teaching of God’s Word.

Some of the weaknesses of the flesh that can lead to apostasy are given below:

1. Failure to recognize and honor the truth of God, manifested in Jesus Christ, who identifies Himself as the truth (John 14:8). The destiny of all liars is the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).
2. Lack of understanding of the majesty and glory of God: who God really is (see Job 37), and the insignificance of man in comparison.
3. The human spirit (the real you), which is given to man by God, and which returns to Him at physical death, must be regenerated for man to have any fellowship or communion with God, or to receive teaching for renewal of the mind. It is through our human spirit that the Holy Spirit works to renew (sanctify) the mind, and it is absolutely essential that we join wholeheartedly in the sanctification process, for if we do not Hebrews 12:14 says we will not “*see the Lord*”.

4. Failure to see that joining Jesus Christ on the cross and dying to one-self means that man's sinful nature dies: man is no longer a slave to sin.

This death does not mean that man no longer commits sins, for the part of man that Satan approaches with his enticements to sin (the id) is still active through lust and pride. Believers must decide (will) to act on wisdom from the Holy Spirit and take authority over these enticements and overcome these urges of the id.

5. Belief that man is not under the power of original sin, but is naturally good. Failure to realize that every imagination of natural man's heart is evil continually (Genesis 6:5), and that we must be born again through the spiritual man, Jesus Christ, for our hearts to be changed.

7. Failure to act on our commitment to God, and be doers of the Word and not hearers only. This is the way the faith of God grows powerful in our lives: by exercising or using it.

8. Failure to abide (submit, stand) in Christ, and find our place within His earthly body (the church). Only by abiding can we share the Holy Spirit's gift(s) and bear fruit in our lives.

9. Failure to believe in the divine and absolute authority of the Bible: the Word of God.

10. Failure to join with other saints in assembling together to worship God, and provoke members of the body unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24-25).

11. Failure to give earnest heed to the things we have heard from the Word of God through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:1-3).

I do not believe that total apostasy happens overnight; it creeps upon you by micro-inches, and Satan seems particularly adept at nurturing its growth to the place where he can pull the plug on “the big one”. We are all aware of notable believers who have succumbed to enticements, and have fallen in disgrace. I once had a personal friend who I considered very close to God: I had placed him on a pedestal (so to speak), partly because he was a prophet used mightily in encouraging and strengthening many saints. We moved to another state and he and his wife came to visit us and to minister in a local meeting of Full Gospel Men’s Fellowship. I noted a difference in him at that time, and my wife told me later that his wife told her that he had been spending a lot of time alone in their bedroom, and had recently been attending movies that many Christians would consider inappropriate. Not too long after they returned to their home he was enticed by Satan through an attractive woman in his church, and eventually fell away into apostasy. This was great blow to me, and many

others, who had grown to love and revere this man. Brothers in Christ came to minister to him in prayer, but he was adamant in rejecting their prayers. I suppose this was the first time that I began to wonder whether it was possible for strong believers to become apostates. Of course, there have been many other such “falls from grace” by ministers over the intervening years. Enticement through lust of the flesh is a strong tool in Satan’s arsenal, and that is why it is so important for believers to be diligent in not overlooking those vices thought to have little, or no negative impact on their relationship with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30). We must be constantly aware of the Holy Spirit’s presence within us when we are tempted in any way whatever, even in idle and unprofitable thoughts: do not grieve the Holy Spirit.

Failure to Believe

We now turn to the other question raised here: how can a person chosen by God fail to become a believer into Jesus Christ? Romans 8:29 GNT, says that those that God “*foreknew*” He “*predestinated*” to be conformed to the image of His Son; and verse 30 goes on to say that those He predestinated, He also “*called*”, and those He called He also “*justified*”, and those He justified He also “*glorified*”. We need to consider the meaning of these important words used in this passage. Moulton’s Revised Analytical Greek Lexicon gives the following definitions: “*foreknew*”- “to appoint as the subjects of future privileges”; “*predestinated*”- “to limit or mark out beforehand; to design definitely beforehand, or-
dain beforehand”; “*called*”- “to call to a participation in the privileges of the Gospel”; “*justified*”- “to hold as guiltless, to accept as righteous, to justify”; and for “*glorified*”- “to glorify by admission to a state of bliss, to beatify”.

The first thing that I notice here is that this appears to be a progressive step-by-step process; those that He “*foreknew*” are predestined to be “*called*”; those that are “*called*” are predestined to be “*justified*”; and those that are “*justified*” are predestined to be “*glorified*”. This should be no surprise, for it seems to be the normal way God deals with mankind: you learn one lesson and then you are ready for the next one, which will usually be more difficult. The big

question here is: can you fail at any one step and thus fail to reach the “*glorified*” state? Let’s address each one of these steps individually:

1. Individuals that God the Father chose are identified as those He “*foreknew*”. Obviously, we had nothing to do with the Father’s decision about those He choose. I think most believers into Jesus Christ are unaware of being chosen until later in life, after they have some kind of personal encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. One way in which this occurs is when the Holy Spirit, now within them, witnesses with their human spirit that they are a child of God (Romans 8:16).
2. We see from the definition of “*predestinated*” given above that when God predestinates those that will be believers He has a plan (or design) for that person’s spiritual life, which also strongly affects their personal life. He keeps the individual on the path as they encounter the vagaries of life: there is just one problem He has in doing this - man’s stubborn will. The relationship God desires to have with His elect is one of friendship (or sonship) based on mutual (agape) love. He could not achieve this by making man a puppet, subject to His every command, for He wanted man to freely choose to love and honor Him, thus, He gave man the freedom to do the exact opposite of what He

desired: choose evil over good. This is what Adam did in the garden of Eden, and man has continued to do down to this present time. When God predestines His chosen ones He has an end-result He wants to achieve: to make them holy, and as much like Jesus as He can before they enter the grave. He has unlimited resources to achieve this, but He will not force man to accept Him as Lord and Master, nor will He force man to accept His guidance.

3. God “calls” us to participate in the privileges of the Gospel. When I saw this definition I was confused by the seeming conflict with another scripture (Matthew 20:16) which says, “. . . *many be called, but few chosen*”. The same English word “*called*” is used in both verses, but the Greek words from which they are derived are different, and have different meanings. The rain falls on the just and unjust alike, but only the chosen will respond, and they do this when the Word is mixed with saving faith (from God) unto belief (Hebrews 4:2).
4. When the chosen are “*called*” they change, they are born-again and join Jesus in death and resurrection: the old sin nature is replaced by the nature of Jesus Christ. I see this as being the time when believers are

“justified” by God the Father: they are now considered guiltless by the Father, and are accepted as being righteous (Acts 13:39).

5. From the definition of *“glorified”* above we see that it corresponds to a state of bliss. This is the state believers move into at physical death, but we note that Jesus was *“glorified by all”* when He taught in Galilee early in His ministry (Luke 4:15). Mounce’s Dictionary of OT and NT Words gives the definition of glorify as “to give honor to, praise”: Webster’s Dictionary adds “extravagant praise”. This is a word not normally applied to men or women during their life on earth, but we see here that God recognizes those that join Him in heaven with that distinguished title.

We see from the above discussion that God the Father is the One behind all the steps in the path to salvation, even though the Son is directly involved in bringing many of these changes to fruition. In all the steps discussed above I do not see any that God enforces as inviolable law, or edict. In fact, if our assumption is correct about this process being progressive (a sequence of succession), making it necessary to complete a step before taking the next one, then the wording of the scripture itself seemingly acknowledges the possibility of failure at any step along the way.

We know from John 6:39-40 that those “*given*” to Christ by the Father “*should*” become believers. This makes you wonder about “drop-outs”, who do not reach the stage of qualifying to be “given”. The Bible seems to establish somewhat of a “milestone” for those who do qualify, so we need to determine when, exactly, the Father “gives” these future saints to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I believe that John 6:44-45, in which Jesus says, “*No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me,*” may be helpful in understanding this. We need to consider the meaning of the word “*draw*” and “*learned*” as used in this scripture. “The Analytical Greek Lexicon, Revised” by Moulton gives the definition of “*draw*” as: “metaphorically to draw mentally and morally”. Mounce’s Dictionary of OT and NT Words definition for “*learned*” points out that the Greek word used here involves comprehension, as well as exposure to information. This begins to give us an idea about what the “drawing” process entails.

Jesus teaching on the washing of regeneration started when He began to wash Peter’s feet in John 13:5-10, but He had been teaching the disciples from the beginning of His ministry. As the passover drew nigh Jesus had

His last meal with the disciples. After the meal Jesus took a towel and began to wash their feet. Peter objected, and in the ensuing discussion Jesus told Peter that if he did not let Him wash his feet he did not have any part with Him. Peter then replied, *“Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head”*. Jesus then told him that He had “washed” them, and they were clean, every whit, but not all (referring to Judas). Later in John 15:3, Jesus clarified what He meant by this saying, *“Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you”*. Jesus was referring to the washing of regeneration, described in many places in the Bible (John 6:44; Ezekiel 36:25; Isaiah 1:16, 4:4; Zechariah 13:1; Psalm 51:2, 7; and Hebrews 10:22), but probably best by Titus 3:5-6 which says, *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour”*. This “drawing”, or “washing” must be accomplished before the Father gives these, soon to be believers, to the Lord.

To continue our story about the disciples experience in preparation to their receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we see Jesus in John 16, describing upcoming events associated with His death, and further describing how the Holy Spirit will take the things of the Lord and show it unto them. In Chapter 17,

Jesus prays for His disciples and asks the Father to sanctify them and keep them from the evil one. He then asks that they behold His glory, and be “*in Him*”, and He “*in them*”. After this, Jesus went to the cross to shed His blood and provide a path of forgiveness for sin.

The next step in the disciples becoming believers and receiving the Holy Spirit is recorded in John 20:19-23, when Jesus appeared to them after His crucifixion. Verse 22 says, “*And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.*” Many Bible scholars teach that this is when the disciples received the Holy Spirit, but this is difficult to reconcile with their conduct over the next fifty days before Pentecost. Notice the change in the lives of the disciples **after** they received the Holy Spirit: they were filled with power that had to be manifested. There is but one step left for disciples before receiving the Holy Spirit that has not been mentioned in the Word to this point: that is the renewing of their human spirit. God communicates with believers via His Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit passes what He gets on to man (actually the biblical heart) via man’s human spirit. Obviously, the human spirit, out of communication with God in unregenerate man, must be enlivened for the Holy Spirit to be effective (Ezekiel 36:26; Job 32:8; Proverbs 20:27; Romans 8:16; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14). I believe this is what transpired

when Jesus breathed on them: He was preparing them to receive the Holy Spirit by breathing life (the ability to communicate with God) into their dead human spirit. This is somewhat like Adam receiving his soul and spirit when God breathed into his nostrils after he had been formed from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). After this there was nothing to hold the disciples back from receiving the Holy Spirit, which they did on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2.

This narrative about the disciples being drawn by the Father and cleansed by washing of the Word, given a renewed human spirit by the breath of the Lord, and finally receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost gives us some idea about when the Father “gives” those He has chosen to the Son. We know that the Father is the One that draws them, cleanses them, and generally prepares them for receiving the Holy Spirit. I was surprised to discover that the Father is also the One that gives believers the Holy Spirit (see John 14:26; Luke 11:13; 1 John 3:24). I had mistakenly thought that Jesus “gave” us the Holy Spirit, but on further study I noted that Jesus “sends” the Holy Spirit, but it is “from” the Father (John 15:26). This causes us to believe that the Father “gives” believers to Jesus after they have received the Holy Spirit, and are ready to enter into sanctification (being conformed to the image of Christ). But before we jump

to any conclusions about this we need to consider Jesus' prayer in John 17. In John 17:1, Jesus asks the Father to "glorify" Him that He may "glorify" the Father. He asks the Father to protect those He has given Him, for He knows He will not be able to care for them from the time of His crucifixion until He joins the Father in heaven, and assumes His new responsibility as Mediator of the new covenant (Hebrews 9:14). John 17:6 seems to leave little doubt that the Father gave Jesus the men out of the world that belonged to Him prior to the time of our Lord's intercessory prayer, recorded here. From Jesus' prayer here we know the Father has "given" not only the twelve, minus one, to His care, but He has also given all those that will believe into Him through their word (John 17:20). In John 17, Jesus seems to be reviewing His entire work on earth, referring in one verse to the time before the world was. In view of the wide space of time covered in Jesus' prayer, I would argue that determining the timing of specific events mentioned is fraught with difficulty, and thus, any conclusion from this about the Father's giving of (future) believers to Jesus should be supported with corroborating evidence.

At this point I feel that we have considered most of the pertinent scriptures related to this question and we should be ready to suggest an answer. From what we have discussed I believe the Father "gives" His elect to His Son Jesus

Christ after they have been washed and cleansed (the washing of regeneration), have received salvation (by mixing the Word with saving faith), been resurrected with the nature of Christ (born-again), and have received the Holy Spirit (been baptized in the Holy Spirit). These spirit-filled believers are now ready to enter the next phase of their lives best described in Romans 12:1-2, *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not confirmed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* This is identified as “sanctification” in the Bible, the purpose of which is to conform believers to the image of Jesus Christ, to make them holy. This work of sanctification will continue until the end of the believer’s life on earth.

Jesus has joined His Father in heaven, and is acting in the role of Mediator of the new covenant. The word “Mediator” is used seven times in the NT, all translations of the same Greek word which means to be an intermediary or conciliator between God and man. In every case this word clearly refers to Jesus Christ, except for Galatians 3:19, which refers to Moses standing between God and the Israelites at Mt. Sinai, when the law was given. From the definition of mediator we recognize that Moses was an intermediary between God

and the Israelites, for the Israelites were afraid “*by reason of the fire*”. I believe the Israelites had good reason to be afraid, for we know that no evil, nor any iniquity can come into the presence of God Almighty (Habakkuk 1:13). Three of the seven uses of this Greek word in the NT relate to Christ’s role as Mediator of the new covenant (or testament). Hebrews 9:15-18 makes an interesting point: “*And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament [covenant], that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which were called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither [even] the first testament [covenant] was [bath not been] dedicated without blood.*” This passage of scripture says that Jesus Christ’s work as Mediator of the new covenant began (or started) at His death, and the purpose or goal of His efforts as Mediator is to cause those that are “given” to Him to receive eternal inheritance (life). Thus, we see that Christ’s role as Mediator is to act as our advocate to the Father, representing us in all things related to receiving our eternal inheritance. 1 Timothy 2:5 says: “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ.” I believe this is the reason we are told to ask the Father **in Jesus’ name**, when we pray. Jesus

Christ is responsible for bringing us “home” without spot or wrinkle, and the Father will only respond through Him: the Father has “given” us to Christ, and He holds Him responsible for completing the task of bringing us into eternal life.

After Jesus receives them He breathes new spirit life into them, and fifty days later on Pentecost He sends the Holy Spirit from the Father. From this point on the believer should enter the sanctification process in which he is watched over with a peculiar, private, jealous guardianship and management by Jesus, our Mediator, through His Holy Spirit, within each believer.

The changes brought about in the lives of the Jewish remnant prophesied about in Ezekiel 36: 25-27, is the pattern described above for believers. We should not be surprised by this for God extends these things to the Gentiles, who He has also prepared (Romans 9:22-26).

Conclusion

Yes, it is possible for one of the elect of God to fall into apostasy. Those that fail to enter into sanctification by the Holy Spirit are especially vulnerable. Surely, those mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 1-3 fall into this category. This

grieves God greatly, but believers must present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is their reasonable service (Romans 12:2). Otherwise, we do not grow in holiness, necessary to ward off the temptations of the evil one (1 John 5:18). If falling away results in total rejection of the Holy Spirit, there is no longer any redemption available. Total apostasy is rejection (or blaspheme) of the Holy Spirit. God will erase the name of such a one from His Book of Life.

And yes, it is possible for someone chosen by God to fail to become a believer. I believe God makes it clear in John 6:45 that it is imperative that those drawn by the Father must “learn” the glad tidings of the Gospel. It is this “learning” that prepares the person to receive the power of faith unto belief.

I am painfully aware that this conclusion differs from just about everything that has been written on this subject. I do not believe I had any preconceived notions about the answer to these thorny questions other than my somewhat feeble belief in “once saved - always saved”. What I have concluded is strictly based on my understanding of God’s Word on this subject. I pray that anyone reading this will likewise study God’s Word and come to their own conclusions.

Chapter 3

Free Will?

Background

Readers may wonder why a question mark has been placed after the title above. Possibly I should have included the word “Spiritual” in the title, for that is what we are considering here: free will in spiritual matters, and in particular the question of receiving (or choosing) salvation. I believe that the phrase “free will” is largely misunderstood in today’s world, and in trying to clear up doubt in my own mind about the meaning of this term, I have discovered that confusion has surrounded this term since the time of the early church. One of the great controversies in early Christianity took place in the fourth century, pitting Saint Augustine against a monk named Pelagius. This controversy was largely related to a disagreement about the relationship of man’s free will to original sin, and to the grace of God. Augustine maintained that before the fall we were free to sin and not to sin, but between the fall and redemption the only freedom left to us was the freedom to sin. After redemp-

tion he maintained that we were free both to sin and not to sin. On the other hand, Pelagius claimed that each of us comes in to the world with complete freedom to sin, or not to sin. In his view there was no such thing as original sin, nor a corruption of human nature forcing us to sin (The Story of Christianity, page 214-215). It was thought that this argument was settled in AD 431, when the third ecumenical council met in Ephesus and condemned Pelagianism, the term used to describe the beliefs of Pelagius. However, in AD 1524, during the Reformation, Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus resurrected this disagreement by publishing writings focusing on the question of man's moral capability, and his dependence on God's grace. Again, the argument seemed settled when Luther's book, "The Bondage of the Will", was accepted as the position of the Reformed church. Luther and the other Protestant leaders of the Reformation agreed that man is unable to do anything in regard to his salvation, and that God's grace is absolutely sovereign and free. Luther's book has been described as the "manifesto" of the Protestant Reformation. An abridged version of Luther's book entitled "Born Slaves" is available through Grace Publications Trust, London, England.

Settling the disagreement between Luther and Erasmus as to whether the deciding factor in salvation was God's responsibility, or man's, seemed to quiet

the confusion for a time, but opposition to Luther's position never completely went away. In the early 1600's a man by the name of Van Harmen (Arminius), who was a professor at Leyden University in the Netherlands, introduced teaching that denied that man was totally helpless, and that it was necessary that he do something himself in order to receive salvation. Again, this teaching was rejected in 1618 when an international synod met at Dortrecht (Dort), and denounced the teaching of Arminius and his followers. Arminianism is a denial and rejection of NT Christianity in favor of a religion of works.

The Meaning of Free Will

In spite of all this history, today we find many evangelicals supporting the view that human beings are basically good, clearly repudiating the biblical view of fallen man needing salvation via the sacrifice of Jesus Christ ("Willing To Believe", by R. C. Sproul). Clearly, the modern-day church is in serious trouble when many, if not most, members reject fundamental Christian beliefs about the doctrine of justification by faith (alone), and the sovereignty of God. The purpose of this writing is to determine what God's Word, the Bible, says about the exercise of man's free will in the process of receiving salvation, and in choosing good or evil. Thus, the meaning of free will in this discussion is fo-

cused entirely on decisions we make that affect our spiritual life, and not on the mundane (free will) decisions we make in everyday life.

I believe the first question we need to answer is: What do we mean when we use the term “free will”? I believe this phrase conveys the meaning that we are not forced or coerced to decide anything, or take action, in any way whatever. The decisions we make, and the actions we take by free will are solely determined by reasoning that is not coerced, based on the evidence available to us, and the situation under which the decision is made, or action is taken. Of course, the memories and thought processes (routines) we have stored in our mind, and have learned through training and experience, will have a bearing on what we decide, but these are “our” memories and “our” thought processes. Such decisions and actions are totally free from any overriding influence of God, or active influence of any other external spiritual power. You may ask: “What about the influence of wives, family, and friends?” Obviously, we are influenced by those around us, but persuasive (or not) words and actions by family and friends, or bosses, for that matter, must be evaluated by our mind/brain before they become active in our decision-making processes. Influences such as these do have a second-order effect, but I think most of us would feel that decisions made under pressure from family, friends, or bosses, do not rob us of

free will: we choose to succumb to these influences, or not, based on how strongly we feel about the decision or action contemplated, and the person trying to influence us.

I think many feel that God, and possibly Satan, can force their will on mankind. Obviously, decisions made in such an eventuality would not be considered free of outside influence. This belief is patently wrong for God's elect, and since we are interested in spiritual decision-making only in this writing, we will concentrate our discussion on those God has chosen. The exchange between God and Satan in the first chapter of the book of Job make it absolutely clear that any power Satan has to influence those God has chosen is prescribed by God. Satan is forced to work through external enticements that appeal to man's internal lusts and pride (1 John 2:16), within the limits imposed by God. God works His will in the life of believers via the Holy Spirit's persuasion; and He persuades through the power of faith, which results in belief. In this process God does not override the individual's will, but works through teaching and instruction, which results in changed hearts and renewed minds, open to the power of faith. God uses "saving faith" to clench the salvation experience (Hebrews 4:2), usually after the subject has been "cleansed" from sin by

the “washing of redemption”. When the believer enters into sanctification he/she “chooses” whether to do God’s will, or not (John 7:17).

When God created man He did not create a robot: He desired a relationship with man that could best be described as friendship (or sonship), based on mutual love, freely given. Thus, when a believer faces a dilemma God provides spiritual guidance, but He does not override human will, nor does He rob the believer of the freedom to make an uncoerced decision. He works through the Holy Spirit to provide spiritual truth to the believer’s soul, and to (hopefully) bring about a decision in accordance with His will (Philippians. 2:13).

The term free will is not mentioned in the Bible. In fact, the Bible refutes the idea that man exercises free will in choosing to accept, or not accept Jesus Christ. John 15:16 says, “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you*”. Jesus was talking to the disciples here, but His teaching throughout this portion of John is directed to all believers that receive the Word of God through faith, and join Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. This scripture goes to the heart of the difficulty in being objective when searching for a biblical understanding of free will. If God chooses some it seems unfair for Him to hold those that He

does not choose responsible for their actions, and to determine where they will spend eternity. Romans 9:15-24 goes to great lengths to describe the majesty and power of God in showing mercy to those He chooses. Chapter 1 refers to the biblical search to determine if any of the words choose, chooseth, chooseth, choosing, chose, and chosen are used to indicate that man exercised his own will to choose God. The overwhelming evidence was that God chooses, we do not. I found no scriptures to support the idea that man can choose God as Savior and Redeemer. The evidence from the study of these six words overwhelmingly supports the fact that God chooses men, men do not choose God. It seems clear from this analysis, based on what God's Word says about this subject, that God chooses based strictly on His own free will (desire), and man's will is only peripherally involved. The Bible teaches that unregenerate man does not have free will. We will consider that next.

The Unregenerate Man and Free Will

When God created man He gave him free will: he could choose to follow God's guidance or he could succumb to Satan's enticements, and satisfy his own lust and pride. Man was absolutely free to choose good (God), or evil (Satan). God is Spirit (John 4:24), and Adam was created in the image of

God. Adam received his human spirit/soul when God breathed the breath of life into him at his creation (Genesis 2:7). Through his spirit/soul he received guidance from God directly, whereas regenerated man receives guidance via his human spirit from the Holy Spirit, and man receives his human spirit while in the womb (Zechariah 12:1). The human spirit/soul is the part of man that returns to God at physical death (Ecclesiastes 12:7). We receive understanding from God in our spirit (Job 20:3, 32:8, Mark 2:8, Romans 8:16, 1 Corinthians 2:11). Adam received guidance from God, but God did not force him to follow this advice. Both Adam and Eve could hear and communicate with Satan, for Satan spoke to Eve in the Garden of Eden, and Adam joined her in succumbing to Satan's enticement, and disobeying God. It is worth noting that Satan approached Eve first. Adam was Eve's cover, or head, in their relationship with God, and Satan knew this. Thus, he approached Eve when she was alone, and vulnerable (not under her cover). Once Eve had eaten of the fruit and disobeyed God she came under Satan's influence, and immediately went to her husband Adam, offering the fruit to him. This is what Satan was after all the time: he wanted to separate Adam from God. Adam was greatly influenced by his wife in this act of rebellion. He undoubtedly recognized that something dramatic had oc-

curred in his wife's life, she had changed spiritually: she had chosen to make her own decisions, and thus to become her own god. In Adam's mind it may have come down to a choice between maintaining his relationship with Eve, or with God. The narrative of this incident in Genesis 3, does not say that Adam thought he would become like God: knowing good and evil. In fact, when God dealt with them for their rebellion it was Eve who confessed that *"the serpent beguiled me, and I did eat"*. In dealing with Adam God said, *"because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, . . ."*, which seems to indicate that Adam was punished because he hearkened to the voice of his wife and ate of the tree, and not because he thought he would become like God. Nevertheless, Adam was free to choose to obey God's warning and not eat the forbidden fruit. As a result of this decision by Adam he lost the ability to fellowship and receive guidance from God, for God told him in Genesis 2:17, that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die. In this warning God was referring to the death (separation from God) of Adam's human spirit, for it was through his spirit that he was able to fellowship and communicate with God.

Through this act of disobedience Adam lost the characteristic that made him like God: his human spirit was now dead to God. Adam lost the free-

dom of will that God gave him when he was formed, he could no longer hear from God and do His will. Once this source of life in Adam was dead, his body began the process of decay that would ultimately lead to his physical death. From this time on we see mankind sink into the filth of sin until finally God says in Genesis 6:5-6, *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart”*. This is the condition of unregenerate man to this day, we are all born in sin with a dead spirit, and have no way to fellowship with God, nor to reflect His image. We do not receive His guidance, but we are still receiving guidance from Satan, through the influence of the world. 1 Corinthians 15:45 says, *“The first man Adam was made a living **soul**; the last Adam was made a quickening [life-giving] **spirit**”* (emphasis added). We inherited a “natural” body from Adam, but through salvation and rebirth into Jesus Christ we are regenerated, and our human spirit is reborn, which allows us to receive the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit as the process of sanctification works to make us holy and conform us to the image of Christ. Now we have free will: we can choose between the guidance we receive

from God through the Holy Spirit, which leads to “good”, or we can succumb to the enticements of the world which lead to “evil”.

As described above, (unregenerate) man never has free will. He is fully able to hear and respond to Satan’s (the world’s) guidance, in fact, he is a slave to this old nature since he has no way of communicating with God. Ephesians 4:18 describes this as, *“Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart”*. Unregenerate man cannot receive guidance from God: 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, *“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned”*. There are many, many scriptures in the Bible that convey this same message: unregenerate man is guided by only one source of information: that of the world. Ephesians 2:2 says, *“Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience”*. A person that can respond to only one source of spiritual guidance in his life does not express free will in the spiritual decisions he makes. You may argue that unsaved people are often “good”, and perform Christian acts and make so-called Christian decisions. We have been blessed in America (at

least in the past), by having a Christian heritage, with Bible-believing churches, and God-fearing parents. I was raised in such an environment and, as a result, believed in God and, for the most part, lived a “good” life while growing up. When I was no longer under the influence of my parents, and had to make decisions based on a whole new set of influences, I found that my “goodness” began to fade away. I did not have an active “good” influence in my life, and, in fact, I came under the strong influence of the world (Satan). The godly guidance and training I received from people I grew up under, and with, was not strong enough to protect me from the enticements of the world. I did not have an active, real-time spiritual guiding force in my life and, as a result, I wasted many years living the lifestyle of the prodigal son. The influence of people in my life, and religious training I had received growing up, were just not adequate to guide me as an adult, trying to cope in a world of irresistible attractions. We need to be able to communicate with God continuously to be able to have any hope of resisting the temptations of this world. I was not able to do that.

If we are going to accept God’s biblical wisdom on this we do not have any choice but to recognize that before we receive Christ we do not have free will in spiritual matters. I believe the confusion on this point derives

from the fact that while we are in an unregenerate condition we make hundreds of decisions every day. We decide when to get out of bed, what to have for breakfast, what clothes we will wear, what we will do with our day, etc., etc. These are what I would call mundane (worldly) decisions. This leads us to the perception that we are free to make every decision that we are confronted with. However, we need to recognize the difference between “fleshly” decisions and “spiritual” decisions. I do not believe that while we are in an unregenerate condition we can make an objective, reasoned, spiritual decision.

Although Satan is certainly a spirit, he has no avenue by which to approach us spiritually. His appeals are to our fleshly man: he is forced to work through enticements to our fleshly nature: lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Of course, unregenerate man can make decisions to refuse to get ensnared by his enticements, but when we make such choices they are based on training we received in the past, not on the informed guidance of the Holy Spirit. It has been my experience that we cannot depend on the moral guidance of our unregenerate conscience. An unregenerate conscience provides an inadequate check on our decisions. Satan’s enticements gradually wear us down, and we eventually

succumb. We need the help of a *comforter*, a constant companion to guide, advise, and encourage us during these difficult tests.

Free Will and the Process of Salvation

We now return to the question raised at the beginning of this article: how does God draw us into eternal life and claim us as His sons and daughters? And how does He do this without overriding our will, and forcing us to accept His will in this regard? The method God devised to solve this problem involves “belief” on the part of unregenerate man, and this belief results from persuasion (the root word for faith), without forcing the will of the unbeliever in any way. Belief into Jesus Christ is initiated by washing the unbeliever in what the Bible calls “*the washing of regeneration*” (Titus 3:5; see also John 3:5; Hebrews. 10:22).

When God begins to draw those that He chose before the foundation of the world (John 6:44; Ephesians 1:4), He begins to wash the dirt of the world from their bodies, both on the inside (the biblical heart), and the outside (the vitiated flesh). In the NT Jesus washed the disciples through His actions and through His teaching. For example, after the last supper He began to wash the disciples feet to teach the need for them to be humble,

and He told them that unless He washed them they would have no part with Him (John 13:8). Later, in John 15:3 He explains that they were clean through the Word He had spoken to them.

He lived and taught them for 3 1/2-years before they were truly repentant and prepared to believe for salvation and receive the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. This process came about from the disciples believing more and more of God's Word: as they opened their hearts to the teaching of Jesus they were equipped to accommodate ever greater faith (power). When the time came for them to receive a new (rejuvenated) human spirit (Ezekiel 36:26; John 20:22), and later to receive God's Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4), they were fully prepared to mix God's saving faith with the Word unto salvation (Hebrews 4:2).

Likewise, all believers into Christ go through some kind of "washing" process. Ezekiel 36:25-29 gives the steps through which an unbeliever becomes a believer. Verse 25 says: *"Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you"*. This process is definitely not the same for all people. Consider the case of Cornelius and those that were gathered with him (Acts 10). Acts 10:44 says, *"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the*

word". Possibly the case of the thief on the cross represents the shortest time for "washing" recorded in the Bible. Luke 23:39-43 records this conversion, and Jesus discerned that this thief was prepared to accompany Him to Paradise. My own personal experience was quite the opposite: I believed "in" Jesus for 25-years before He considered me ready to take the step of believing "into" Him.

As we have outlined above, when the penitent is "clean" (John 13:10, 15:3), and has his human spirit enlivened, his resistance to the power of God's faith working through his body is greatly diminished: he is now positioned to receive God's power of saving faith unto belief (Hebrews 4:2). In this manner the penitent exposes himself to God's Word, which cleanses him. He then begins to open himself (within) to the teachings of the Word, and to the power of faith, which results in belief. As belief grows within, the penitent is ever more open to the power of faith, which results in ever stronger belief. In none of these events has God in any way forced His will on the penitent: rather, the penitent learns about spiritual things gradually, learning a little at a time, finally getting to the point where he is prepared to receive the power of saving faith, and belief in Jesus Christ as his savior.

Most of us know what happens when we join Jesus in His death and resurrection: *“If the Son therefore shall make you free, you shall be free indeed”* (John 8:36). This happens as a result of God washing us, regenerating (enlivening) our dead spirit, and giving us the Holy Spirit. When this happens we are able to have fellowship with, and receive guidance from God. Instead of talking to God face to face as Adam seemingly did, He talks to our human spirit through His Holy Spirit that He places within us. God’s plan of salvation delivers us from bondage. He does this by giving us a “new” heart and renewed spirit, by purging our conscience from dead works through the blood of Christ, and freeing us from slavery to the “fleshly” nature we inherited from Adam. We then know the truth and the truth makes us free (John 8:32). We are no longer slaves, but are now free to obey the guidance we receive from the Holy Spirit, or to follow the demands of our human body’s lusts and pride, and become enticed by Satan’s lures. We are like Adam was originally, he had access to God’s guidance and to Satan’s influence, and he was free to choose between the two. We are now fully free to make decisions that are godly, or evil: **we now have free will.**

Chapter 4

The Foreknowledge of God

God tells us in Isaiah 55:8-9 that His thoughts are not our thoughts, and that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. In spite of this prophecy, which seems to mitigate against our being able to understand the mind of God, I feel that this subject is so important in regard to our trust, belief and acceptance of God's Word, that we need to "reason together" about what the Bible says He knew (or did not know), as well as other issues concerning God's relationship with mankind. These are questions that have been deliberated since the time of the early church, and two fairly recent books, "What Does God Know and When Does He Know It?" by Millard Erickson; and "Satan and the Problem of Evil" by Gregory Boyd, remind us that this discussion is still ongoing.

Argument Against God's Total Foreknowledge

There are many passages in the Bible that seem to indicate that God did not know what certain men were going to do before they actually did it. The meaning here may be that God knows the plan, or purpose man has, but not every instantaneous decision that will be made on the way to fulfillment of that plan (see Genesis 6:6-7, 22:1-19; 1 Samuel 15:11, 35; 2 Chronicles 32:31; Jeremiah 26:2-4). God also frequently repents, and changes His mind (Genesis 18:20-33; 2 Kings 20:1-20; Jeremiah 18:7-11, 26:2-3, 13, 19; Jonah. 3:10). God's gave mankind the freedom to react impulsively, without thinking through what they might do in advance in a particular situation. The whole idea behind God's testing of believers is to determine what they will do in stressful situations: will they listen to His guidance and act accordingly, or will they choose to respond as they often have in the past to that particular test (Genesis 22:1-19; Exodus 16:4). To believe that God already knows what our response will be would invalidate the test: why proof-test something to see if it will withstand the pressure if you already know that it will. I realize that there is some value in **our** knowing that we have passed a certain test, and that we are prepared to go on

to deeper things, but I believe our Maker and Builder is also vitally interested in seeing His creation stand up to the test and become more like Christ. Testing of the power of faith working in our lives is the way God determines whether we are growing spiritually. 1 Peter 1:7 says, *“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”* Notice that this scripture says that it *“might be found”*. An indication that God did not know until He saw the results of the test. An excellent example of this in the OT is the test of Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac. Genesis 22:11-12 records what happened when Abraham raised the knife to slay Isaac on the altar: *“And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said Here am I. And he said, Lay not your hand on the lad, neither do any thing unto him: for **now** I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thy only son from me”* (emphasis added). I do not believe the text would have included the phrase *“now I know”*, if God already knew that Abraham trusted and feared Him completely.

The Bible is filled with the failures of God’s chosen (individuals, nations, and bodies of people). In many of these cases God recorded in scripture the great things He planned for them to achieve. To believe that He already knew

they would fail seems questionable, at best. God's selection and later replacement of king Saul is a good example of this (1 Samuel 28). God's anger was so aroused with the Israelites on occasion that He swore to Moses that He would destroy them entirely. Moses interceded for Israel, and God relented (Exodus 32:9-14). This happened more than one time during Moses' leadership of Israel. Is it reasonable to believe that God would express such emotion if He already knew they would do these things? He was so angry at the evil in man that He destroyed the earth by flood, and then repopulated it through Noah's family. Is it reasonable to believe that God knew beforehand that the man He created would be so consumed by evil that He would have to destroy mankind and start over? The Bible records the fact that God changes His mind when the situation warrants it. The stories about Jonah and Nineveh, and Hezekiah's fifteen year lengthened life are good examples of this. In Jeremiah 18:8 and 26:3 God tells Jeremiah that if the people of Israel will turn from their evil ways He will change His mind about the disaster He pronounced against them. We know from this that God can change His mind. In fact, this is one of the purposes of intercessory prayer, as evidenced by the first intercessory prayer recorded in the Bible: Abraham's appeal to God about Sodom and Gomorrah. The OT records many instances in which God expressed disappointment with

Israel. The church (Christ's body) has failed in many ways to represent Christ in our present-day world, and I cannot help but believe that God is heart-broken at our failure. After all, He has given us His very self in the person of the Holy Spirit, so that we might have power over evil in the world; but sadly, evil is winning. Of course, we realize that God knew evil would ultimately flood His creation, for He prophesied about this in the book of Daniel and other OT prophetic books, in the Gospels, and in the book of Revelation. Nevertheless, I believe He is grieved, and greatly disappointed when He sees our lack of success in spreading God's love throughout the world. The fact that God's agape love is greater than evil makes our failure even more inexcusable.

Psalm 139 is one of the most informative sources in the Bible regarding God's foreknowledge about our thoughts and actions. I would like to suggest an interpretation of this Psalm that recognizes God's omniscience, and still conforms to the freedom He provided in the relationship He established between Himself and man. God clearly knows our heart better than we ourselves, thus He knows the motives for our actions which we often do not clearly perceive. He also knows when we act: our sitting down and our rising up. He is aware of our thoughts, so we cannot escape His oversight when we are tempted to entertain some lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, or pride of life

(1 John 2:16). He has a plan for the life of every believer, and He chastises and corrects us when we stray from that plan. He knows us better than we know ourselves and thus, He is aware of what we are likely to do, or not do. He hears all the words that come from our mouths, and we know what comes from our mouths is really coming from our hearts (Matthew 15:18). The one thing I see here that He seemingly does not know for certain is what action we will, or will not take, based on the guidance He provides through the Holy Spirit, and the worldly influences that drive our will. He offers us the will to do the right thing, but we must act on it (Philemon 2:13). We may have a thought or an idea about something (which God will know), but in many instances we fail to carry it to fruition, or we may act in an entirely different and unexpected manner, with a purpose or aim not previously thought out. I believe that these are the things that God does not know until we actually carry them through into action: they are spontaneous. Webster defines the word spontaneous as, “acting in accordance with, or resulting from a natural feeling, impulse, or tendency, without any constraint, effort, or premeditation”. In other words, these are actions that we do not think through before we take them, or actions for which we do not follow our plan of thought. Until a thought or action “exists” it has no reality, and I do not believe that God concerns Himself with unrealities.

The definition of faith, given in Hebrews 11:1 may help in understanding this philosophic concept: “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” In other words things hoped for are brought into reality by faith. If we are hoping for something serious with great intensity it draws God’s attention. If the thing hoped for is consistent with God’s plan for our lives He will often provide faith (persuasion), which results in belief, and the thing hoped for will be realized. The frivolous things hoped for never come into God’s view, but when the importunity level reaches the threshold, God’s interest focuses on the need, and responds appropriately. Not always in accordance with our desire, but always better in the long run.

To return to our example of Abraham, I believe that God was reasonably sure that Abraham would act as he did, and be totally obedient. God knew Abraham’s ways and his thoughts, so He would have expected him to sacrifice Isaac on the altar; however, until Abraham raised the knife, and was poised to slay Isaac there was a slight chance that he would change his mind at the last moment. Abraham was certainly overcome with grief, and if he allowed his personal emotions to guide his action, he could easily have withdrawn the knife and cried out to God in despair. When the angel of God said “*now I know ...*”, He was recognizing the fact that Abraham had totally submitted to

God's will under very stressful circumstances, and this was what He was looking for: a man that would be obedient even unto the death of his only promised son, a man that would do the Father's will (desire). This entire story foreshadows the crucifixion of Jesus some 1900 years later, and gives us some insight into how God the Father felt about the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Scriptural Meaning of Foreknowledge

The Greek word interpreted “foreknowledge” occurs only two times in the NT: Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:2. There are no uses of any Hebrew words interpreted as “foreknowledge” in the OT. The Greek word “*πρόγνωσις*”, which is interpreted by the English word “foreknowledge”, is used in the NT to mean “previous determination, purpose” (Analytic Greek Lexicon Revised, by Harold K. Moulton). The Greek word interpreted “foreknown” is defined as, “to know beforehand, to be previously acquainted with, Ac. 26:5; 2 Pe.3:17; to determine beforehand, to fore-ordain, 1 Peter 1:20; in NT, . . . to foreknow, to appoint as the subjects of future privileges, Romans 8:29; 11:2.” Strong's Exhaustive Concordance indicates that the Greek word “*πρόγνωσις*”, interpreted “foreknowledge” actually means “prognosis” in English. Prognosis is defined as

a forecast, and a forecast is defined as a prophecy. Thus, we see that all the uses of these words in the NT contemplate some sort of previous involvement by God.

To ascertain the contextual meaning of this word we need to consider how it is used in these two scriptures. Acts 2:23 says, “*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain:*”. In this verse we see that this act was in accord with God’s “*counsel*” and perfect foresight in all the steps involved. The word “*counsel*” comes from a Greek word “βουλή” (boule), which comes from a root meaning “a will”, resulting from determination rather than knowledge. This was God’s determined purpose, made with the full knowledge and concurrence of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, before the world began (John 10:18, 13:3, 14:31; Philippians 2:8). John McArthur’s Study Bible notes on this verse say, “From eternity past (2 Titus 1:9; Revelation 13:8) God predetermined that Jesus would die an atoning death as part of His part of His preordained plan (Acts 4:27-28, 13:27-29).” I have no doubt that God the Father engineered this momentous event, for He had already planned it with the Savior, and thus both He and His first-begotten Jesus were committed to bringing it to completion. As we can

see from above, this was a “prophecy” from God, and He always insures that His prophecies are fulfilled.

1 Peter 1:2 says, *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ; Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.”* In this verse Peter is writing his letter to *“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”* In other words Peter is writing to those God chose before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), and the word “foreknowledge” is used to forecast, or prophesy that He has chosen these elect as His own, and is committed to bringing them to eternal life through the blood of Christ, and renewing their minds through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In an earlier chapter we mentioned that John MacArthur’s Study Bible says the words predestinated and foreknowledge have the same meaning according to a rule in Greek grammar called the Granville Sharp Rule. This is another confirmation of the understanding we get from Acts 2:23 and 1 Peter 1:2. In his study notes on 1 Peter 1:2, MacArthur says this about foreknowledge, “The same Greek word is translated foreordained in 1 Peter 1:20. In both verses the word does not refer to awareness of what is going to happen, but it clearly means a predetermined relationship in the knowledge of God. God brought

the salvation relationship into existence by decreeing it into existence ahead of time. Christians are foreknown for salvation in the same way Christ was fore-ordained before the foundation of the world to be a sacrifice for sins (cf Ac. 2:23). 'Foreknowledge' means that God planned before, not that He observed before (cf. Exodus 33:17; Jeremiah 1:5; Amos 3:2; Matthew). Thus, God pre-thought and pre-determined or predestined each Christian's salvation." It seems clear that these passages do not use the word "foreknowledge" in the sense of God knowing **everything** that will come to pass in the future. The things He has predetermined and confirmed by prophecy, covenant, promise, or through prayer, He causes. For things that He has not predetermined, He also has considerable knowledge and insight as to the likely outcome, but I do not believe He has absolute knowledge about reactions to situations and events that have not yet occurred (do not exist). I feel sure that God was 99.44% sure about how Abraham would react in the sacrifice of Isaac, but until he was well into the act of slaying his only son, He did not know absolutely that Abraham would be obedient in this extremely difficult test.

Anthropomorphism

There are many instances recorded in the Bible where God repented, or changed His mind, as well as occurrences in which He did not know what men would do in a particular situation. Many Christians seem to believe that God could not have repented in these situations because He knew what would happen all along, but He allowed the scripture to be written to say He did repent, or really did not know what would happen. He supposedly did this so that readers could identify more readily with Him, the story, and the teaching. The word that describes this phenomenon is “anthropomorphism”, which is “an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics”. In this discussion we are considering “biblical” anthropomorphism: any attribution of human characteristics (or characteristics assumed to belong only to humans), to God. The term was coined in the mid 1700s, and is derived from the combination of the Greek ἄνθρωπος (*ánthrōpos*), "human" and μορφή (*morphē*), "shape" or "form". A word often used in the OT that provides a good example of this phenomenon is the word “repent”. Most people think of repenting as an act of humans only, but in many OT stories the word is applied to God, as something He does when He changes His mind, or reverses

some previous act. I do not understand how individuals that interpret the Bible by “attributing” human characteristics to God, actually understand God’s feelings in these situations: do they believe that God really changes His mind (or did not know something), or that God knowing everything would never have need to repent or learn anything new. It seems that those that feel this way would have some sort of disconnect in their mind when confronted by Bible stories containing these dilemmas.

This does not appear to be a problem to those of us who believe that God has feelings, thoughts, and wisdom just as we do: the difference is that the Godhead represents perfection in all these, and is totally holy, without any evil. God’s purpose in the life of the believer on earth is to make him/her as much like our perfect model (Christ) as possible. We resemble Him in ways we can hardly imagine. The triune Godhead created us in His image: spirit, soul, and body. From this we know that the triune God has a spirit (the Holy Spirit), a soul (the Father), and a body (Jesus Christ), and that the human spirit, soul, and body manifest many of the attributes vested in the triune God.

I struggled for a long time trying to find proof about the feelings and thoughts (the nature) of God when I finally realized that it was right in front of me, in Galatians 5:22-23 GNT, *“But the fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, long-suf-*

fering, kindness, goodness, faith [faithfulness], *meekness, self-control*.” These represent the actions, feelings, and thoughts of the triune God, and all of these are made available to those having received the Holy Spirit. Of course, we must be growing spiritually to allow the Holy Spirit in us the freedom to manifest these fruits. You may ask, “What about the negative attributes”? This is a good question, and I believe the answer is also in this same passage. These positive attributes of God do not prevent Him from knowing the lack, or negative side (lack) of these fruits. God certainly knows the lack of agape love, and demonstrates this in His encounter with Peter in John 21:15-17 GNT. Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him with agape love, Peter answered that he loved Him with phileo (brotherly) love. Jesus asked Peter again if he loved Him with agape love? Peter again answered that he loved Him with brotherly (phileo) love. The third time Jesus asked Peter do you love me with brotherly (phileo) love and Peter answered that he loved Him with brotherly (phileo) love. Jesus was tempted by the third type of love (lust to satisfy bodily desire) after He was led into the wilderness to be tempted by devil, who thought he could entice Jesus through His extreme hunger (Matthew 4:8-9). Jesus rejected Satan saying man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. Thus, we see that God knew love perfectly, and certainly manifested it

in many ways. I believe the same argument could be made for all these fruits, God knows them all perfectly and can manifest both the good and bad of each one, as the situation warrants. I see no reason whatever to deny that God has many (if not all) of the feelings we have, and certainly understands the thoughts entertained in our minds (Psalm 139).

Conclusions

1. God's knowledge and actions are perfect and totally effective, based on the knowledge He has. There is no error in His thinking and there are no deficiencies in the actions He takes, but He does not know all the end result of every action involving man. When God created man He established a relationship based on friendship and agape love. He adopts those that believe into Jesus Christ, and they become His children. In doing this He desired a relationship based on mutual love, freely given. As a result He gave mankind the freedom to choose to follow His guidance, or not. Except in situations that impact God's chosen, unregenerate mankind does not receive His guidance, and therefore, cannot follow it.
2. God's goal for those He has chosen is perfection. Obviously, no man has achieved this goal other than Jesus Christ, our Savior. In working toward

this goal He renews the mind of believers as they are sanctified (made holy): conformed to the image of Christ. Depending on the degree to which the believer is conformed, he follows God's will. When Jesus ascended to His Father He took up the role as Mediator of the new covenant. From heaven He guides (and chastises) us as necessary to insure that believers enter eternal life at death of the body.

3. In none of men's actions does God know absolutely what a particular believer will do until He actually does it: until the action becomes a reality (Note: This is my own conclusion, God does not give us positive guidance on this). Of course, God has great knowledge concerning mankind, and as a result, He has great insight about what man will do in any particular situation. In some cases God has predestined certain things to happen. Prophecies of God are sure to occur because He has committed Himself to bringing them about. This also applies to covenants, commands, answers to prayers, and other situations in which God actively participates as a result of a commitment He has made.

4. Many believers interpret the Bible by "attributing" human characteristics to God. In this chapter we have tried to offer the argument that God actually feels many (if not most) of the feelings we have. Those that believe God

knows every future event before it happens must have mixed feelings when confronted by a Bible passage that says God did not know, or that He repented about something He had previously done. It seems to me that those that feel this way would have some sort of disconnect in their mind when confronted by these dilemmas. I am one that is not disturbed when the Bible says God repented: I believe He actually repented, and when it says that He did not know what someone would do, I believe that He actually did not know. This certainly does not lessen God's majesty to me; this is the way I believe He chose to establish His relationship with mankind: in fact, one of Jesus' names is truth, and I believe the Bible to be absolute truth.

Closure

At the beginning of this chapter we mentioned the scripture in Isaiah 55:8 which says, "*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord.*" This seems to imply that we cannot know God's thoughts, nor His ways. I believe it is appropriate to refer to the nature of God as one of the many mysteries He has included in His Word. The word mystery is defined in the NT as being "a secret that would remain such except for revelation". I believe God's nature is something that He wants us to understand, but only

through diligent study and prayer for guidance. Another scripture that is encouraging in this regard is 1 Corinthians 2:11-12, *“For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”*

I trust that those that have received the Holy Spirit can discover the things of God if they have enough desire, and are willing to do the research required. I pray that I have been successful in attempting to understand the nature of God in this analysis.

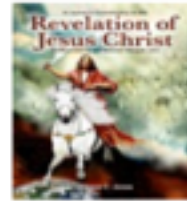
Appendix

Other Books Available



Books Available by Jesse C. Jones

[After the "Big Bang"](#)



[A Layman's Commentary on the Revelation of Jesus Christ](#)



[A Man of God](#)

[Can God Be Known?](#)



[Dialogue With an Atheist](#)

[Has God Divorced America?](#)



[The Mystery of God](#)

[The Spiritual Life](#)



[Weighed in the Balances](#)

[Bible Stumbling Blocks](#)



Note: All of the above e-books are available online and are free to download & share via [SCrosnoe on Scribd](#)



[The Path to Holiness](#)
(paperback)
available for purchase [online](#)